



Christian Citizenship

“You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:13-16). One way to be salty and let our light shine is by being good citizens on earth. Our vocation as citizens of both the secular kingdom and God’s kingdom gives us the responsibility to proclaim God’s Word and care for our neighbors. We are called to engage the “public square” with our message of Christ’s mercy for all. Please pray for God’s will to be done... in Jesus’ name.

The Magdeburg Confession: Resistance to Tyranny

[Editor’s note: In the December 2021 edition of *Christian Citizenship*, we focused on The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrate. It is time to do so again. The following is excerpted from “The Magdeburg Confession of 1550” by Rev. Larry Beane in *Gottesblog*, October 5, 2020.]

The Magdeburg Confession lays out a theology of resistance to tyranny based on the Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrate. The autonomous city of Magdeburg, with its spirit of political independence and theological insistence on adhering to Lutheran theology, come what may, arguably saved the Reformation in the year 1550. The city stood alone in refusing to surrender the Lutheran confession to Charles V’s so-called Augsburg Interim. Magdeburg paid for its tenacity by being put under military siege for a year, until the imperial forces backed off and negotiated a settlement that allowed the Lutheran confession to coexist with Roman Catholicism in the Empire.

The Confession is a theological treatise, but it happens in a very real political context—and thus the narrative has not only ecclesiastical and doctrinal implications, but also serves to teach us political lessons in our world today.

In 1550, there was no Germany. That would not come until the late 19th century. Europe was feudal, comprised of a patchwork of small governments. What we call Germany today was part of the so-called Holy Roman Empire (HRE). As is often said, the HRE was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. It was a crazy-quilt of kingdoms, principalities, duchies, and free cities in what is today mainly Germany and Italy. The emperor was elected by certain elector princes.

The HRE was more a loose confederation than an empire, one which offered maximum liberty because of

the concept of competition. There were no passports. The countries were small. The German language was spoken across a large swath of the Empire. And so, if a prince was abusive, raised taxes too high, or impeded free markets—people could vote with their feet and move. It didn’t involve emigrating hundreds of miles away, securing work visas and a path to citizenship, and learning a new language.

The economist and philosopher Hans-Hermann Hoppe argues that Europe’s successes in science, exploration, economics, scholarship, and the arts were due to this vast decentralization . . . which allowed free trade and competition with one another. . . . This kind of political decentralization existed in the HRE and it made the Reformation possible. Had Charles V been an actual emperor instead of a figurehead overseeing a loose confederacy, he would have had no problem capturing and executing all religious dissidents. However, the confederal nature of the Empire made it possible for the local German princes to interpose in order to protect Luther and other reformers—to the frustration of both Charles V and the papacy.

It was Frederick the Wise’s courageous interposition as an elector that saved Luther’s life following his condemnation at the Diet of Worms. Luther’s friend Nicolaus von Amsdorf was involved in the “kidnapping” that brought Luther to safety. Amsdorf was to become the leader of the Magdeburg resistance and the first signatory to the 1550 Confession.

The Reformation flourished . . . in the marketplace of ideas. . . . [C]hurches and universities spread the faith of the Evangelical confession (as Lutherans were known in those days) . . . thanks to free markets and capitalism. Magdeburg became a hub of Lutheran theology and publication of theological books and pamphlets. A centralized state would have had far better success in banning books and pamphlets and crushing dissenting opinions than a confederation of small sovereignties.

. . . If Americans truly value their liberty, they too will look to find ways of decentralizing the country back to its original federalism, instead of the nationalism and consolidation that has taken root instead. One path toward such a devolution is nullification (sometimes

called “interposition”), which is what the Magdeburgers pioneered in 1550. With our own patchwork of state and local jurisdictions, our spirit of political independence, and our constitutional system of federalism, we could conceivably restore the republic and become, once more, heirs of Magdeburg.

What can we do? Consider that a 5-4 decision by the Supreme Court can impose unlegislated national laws on all of the people of all of the states that enforce doctrines contrary to Scripture, natural law, and reality itself. In small groups, discuss: In what ways are we in the same boat as the 1550 Magdeburgers? Will we move in the direction of centralization, stagnation, and slavery, or will we be sons and daughters of Magdeburg? Study this history and confession in both its theological and political frameworks by visiting www.defytyrants.com and reading *Tyranny and Resistance: the Magdeburg Confession and the Lutheran Tradition* from CPH or Amazon. Learn how the Magdeburg Confession has proven to be a blessing to Christians and non-Christians in dealing with tyrannical government in opposition to human dignity and flourishing according to God’s will and providence. (Appreciation to Rev. Larry Beane.)

Please pray that in the face of tyranny, God’s people act according to His will... in Jesus’ name.

Hate Evil Systems, Love Your Persecutors

Richard Wurmbrand, also known as Nicolai Ionescu, was a Romanian Lutheran pastor. In 1948, having become a Christian ten years before, he publicly said Communism and Christianity were incompatible. He paid a high price for boldly preaching the Gospel of Christ. For over 14 years, he suffered starvation and torture in prison. In May of 1966, two years after his final release from captivity, Wurmbrand testified before the U.S. Senate’s Internal Security Subcommittee. Stripping to the waist, he revealed 18 deep wounds covering his torso. Even so, Wurmbrand proclaims in his classic book, *Tortured for Christ*, that those who imprisoned and tortured him “knew not what they did.” He and his fellow prisoners understood that their persecutors were all programmed “Manchurian candidates,” brainwashed slaves of “principalities and powers,” of “rulers of the darkness of this world” and “spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Until he died at age 91 in 2001, Wurmbrand’s message was faithful and unchanging: “Hate the evil systems, but love your persecutors. Love their souls, and try to

win them for Christ.” Wurmbrand had compassion for his jailers. In *Tortured for Christ*, he writes:

The enormous amount of drunkenness in Communist countries exposes the longing for a more meaningful life, which communism cannot give. The average Russian is a deep, big-hearted, generous person. Communism is shallow and superficial. He seeks the deep life and, finding it nowhere else, he seeks it in alcohol. He expresses in alcoholism his horror about the brutal and deceitful life he must live. For a few moments, alcohol sets him free, as truth would set him free forever if he could know it.

Even while enduring torture, Wurmbrand dedicated himself to “bringing the joys of Christ” to “the communists who are so empty spiritually. How is such an attitude possible? Wurmbrand writes:

*I have seen Christians in communist prison with fifty pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold—and praying with fervor for the communists. This is humanly inexplicable! It is the love of Christ, which was poured out in our hearts. (Sources: *Tortured for Christ*, Voice of the Martyrs [founded by Richard Wurmbrand], and the Wurmbrand Foundation.)*

What can we do? Recognize that we are living in a world where “powers and principalities” war against Jesus Christ, who is Truth. Be assured that “the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him” (Matt. 24:44). Remember, “Not all of us are called to die a martyr’s death, but all of us are called to have the same spirit of self-sacrifice and love to the very end as these martyrs had.” (Pastor Wurmbrand)

Please pray that Christ’s love will overflow to those who do evil to us... in Jesus’ name.

For Your Reading: The Gates of Hell

In 1921, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia was in critical condition. Nevertheless, brave yet ordinary German-Russian Lutherans remained faithful in the face of state persecution. Against all human odds, God preserved His church. V’Yacheslav Horpynchuk, Bishop of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, writes: “*The Gates of Hell* [by Matthew Heise] helps us to recognize the signs of the time, so that we are not lulled by songs of the world and the devil and caught in their traps unprepared.” In Jesus’ name, let us pray to be like the brave, yet ordinary saints before us. AMEN.

Please pray for God's mercy... in Jesus' name.